Past Pursuits

A Newsletter of the Special Collections Division
Akron-Summit County Public Library

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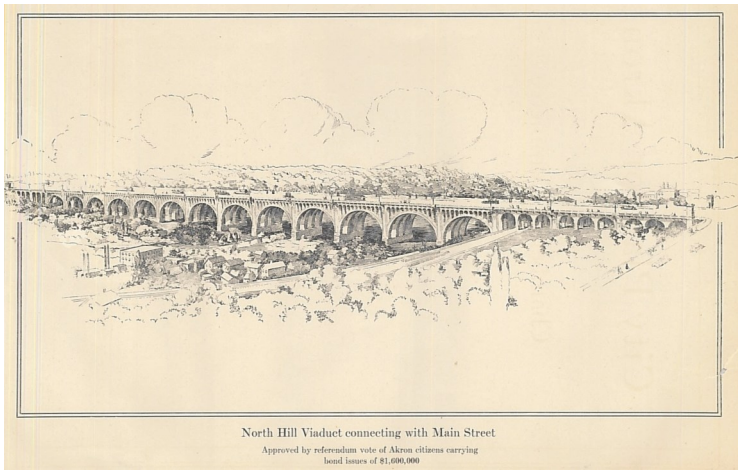
A Place for Everything in a Well-Regulated Town: Akron's First City Plan

by Cheri Goldner, Librarian


North Hill Viaduct connecting with Main Street
Approved by referendum vote of Akron citizens carrying
bond issues of $1,600,000

The proposed North Hill Viaduct, as sketched in John Nolen's City Plan for Akron*, was accurately seen as a crucial thoroughfare.*

With the growth of Akron's rubber industry in the 1910s, the city's population doubled, requiring more homes, businesses, and infrastructure to support the new residents. Around 1915, some of Akron's leaders took notice and joined in the national conversation on city planning. The City Beautiful Movement, the American architectural reform that aimed to bring beauty and grandeur into cities while promoting civic virtue, was well underway. In 1909, Benjamin C. Marsh published the nation's first book dedicated to city planning, *An Introduction to City Planning: Democracy's Challenge and the American City,* and organized the first national meeting on the topic, the National Conference on City Planning and Congestion in Washington, D.C. Marsh took the idea of planning beyond aesthetics and more into social reform. While he was viewed as radical and uncompromising by some and would later move in a different direction, the conference that he founded continued.

Among the attendees of the 1915 national conference was Vincent Stevens, secretary of the Akron Chamber of Commerce. Stevens returned home from the conference the very week in June that Governor Frank Willis signed a city planning commission bill. The bill gave Ohio mayors the power to appoint a commission of the mayor, the service director, president of the board of park commissioners and four citizens to make plans and maps of the city. They could also establish rules for things such as the height of office buildings, the distances residences must sit back from the streets and from each other, changes in streets, new park lands, and new allotments. A June 9, 1915 *Akron Beacon Journal* article stated that Stevens "came back to Akron determined to interest the city in establishing a city planning commission."

The law wouldn't take effect until 1916, but Stevens and a few other proponents of a planning commission kept the idea in the news, and he brought George B. Ford, chairman of the town planning committee of the American Institute of Architects, to a chamber of commerce luncheon in October. In a lecture that was illustrated with stereopticon views, Ford spoke on the importance of the right scale in building and argued for the use of color. After his talk, he toured the city with Stevens and praised the post office, Miller School building and National City Bank building as illustrations of what could be done with mass and contrast of materials in architecture.

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City planners, including members of the chamber of commerce, the architects' club, and the real estate board, were so enthusiastic about the law that would take effect on January 1 that they met on New Year's Eve to discuss it. City council granted new mayor William J. Laub the authority to form a planning commission in mid-February. By March 10, he had named four men to serve on it alongside Service Director Carl F. Beck, Park Commission President C. B. Raymond and himself: Will Christy, who was vice-president of Northern Ohio Traction & Light; James Shaw, superintendent of Colonial Salt; Julius Boenisch, an architect and instructor at Akron University; and E. E. Workman, a real estate dealer and former president of the real estate board.

Within a week, the group held its first meeting, wrote and passed its bylaws and constitution, elected officers, and received complaints from real estate men about resolutions such as requiring rounded corners on all corner lots and forbidding dead end streets. The committee moved right along, spurred by the hosting of the 1916 national city planning conference in Cleveland.

Forty members of the American Society of Landscape Architects attending the conference visited Akron as guests of Frank Seiberling and Harvey Firestone, touring their factories and inspecting the grounds of their homes. Among the visitors were three from Massachusetts who would have an influence on Akron's landscape: Warren H. Manning, who was hired by Seiberling to design Stan Hywet's grounds; Frederick Law Olmstead, president of the conference and famed urban park planner; and John Nolen, who was soon hired to help in Akron's planning by Frank H. Adams, chair of the city improvement committee of the chamber of commerce.

HOUSING NEED IS PARAMOUNT, PLANNER SAYS

John Nolen, City Expert, Says Akron Also is Lacking in Parks

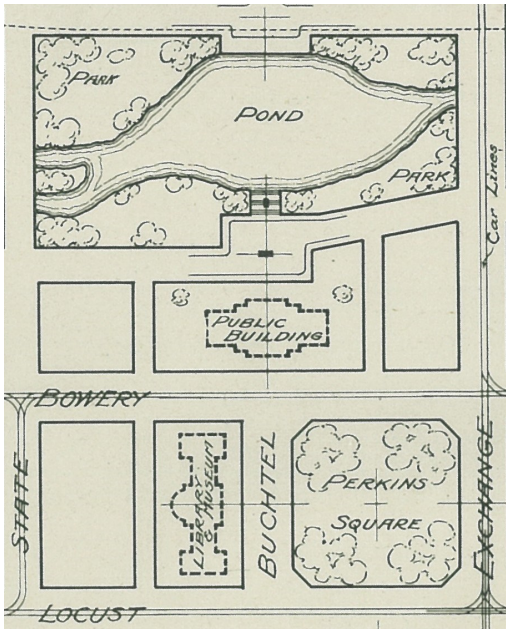
Lack of adequate housing and recreation facilities were pictured as Akron's worst defects by John Nolen, city planner, in an address Saturday noon to Chamber of Commerce members at the Portage hotel.

Nolen urged building of more homes, and pointed out that the average American city of Akron's size spends six times as much a year for park development.

A poor street system was characterized as the worst handicap Nolen will have to overcome in devising a plan for Akron. He said Akron has only two thoroughfares and these are deficient in many ways.

Akron Beacon Journal, *September 23, 1916.*

As reported in the *Beacon* on July 5, 1916, the planning commission accepted Adams' offer to have a city planning map made at his own expense that would show the location of streets, buildings and parks and make recommendations for future building. In an August 4 article, Adams announced that Nolen would return to Akron to help develop an intelligent city plan that would include the building of the North Hill Viaduct, more homes at reasonable prices for working men, and a zone system of housing.



Map of the city center as proposed in City Plan for Akron.

Nolen visited in September and articulated some of Akron's challenges to the chamber of commerce. "You cannot start a street in Akron and extend it very far. First thing you know, the street jumps off into ravine or bumps into a hill, canal, river or railroad track." Though he recognized Goodyear's housing as a model plan, the city in general lacked adequate housing and parks. He also noted the lack of an orderly grouping of public buildings.

While Nolen completed his preliminary survey and reports in late 1917, the plan was largely suspended during World War I. Work resumed quickly following the signing of the armistice in November 1918 in anticipation of a post-war building boom. Nolen travelled to Akron in January 1919 to meet with the city improvement committee to present the final plan and discuss its release. The committee hired Frank B. Williams of New York City to work with Nolen on the legal requirements for putting the plan into effect, such as acquiring land for public use, building regulations, districting, and finance.

Nolen revealed his 91-page *City Plan for Akron* to the chamber of commerce and interested members of the public in a meeting at the

Armory on May 23, 1919. Full of maps, statistics, and photographs, the plan's main recommendation called for moving the business center of Akron from the Main-Market-Mill location half a mile south to Main and Exchange. He also suggested making Buchtel Avenue a block north of Exchange Street into a great city mall, clearing an entire block west of Main Street for a park and widening the canal at this point into a lake. He grouped public buildings like the post office, city hall, library, and a public market around the Buchtel park, and proposed new car lines and streets leading toward the city center.

A resolution was proposed at the meeting to submit the Nolen plan to the city planning commission and city council. Reception was mixed, with many applauding Nolen's efforts and some area businesses, including banks and real estate developers, referencing it in their newspaper ads. However, Market Street business owners launched a bitter fight to retain their dominance. The plan may not have been followed as Nolen and other local planners had hoped, but it likely had an influence in the city's charter being changed to include zoning, the development of area parks, and recreational areas downtown. In 1973, Planning Director James Alkire stated that Nolen's work was still the basis for much of the development in Akron.

The full plan is available on the City of Akron Department of Planning and Urban Development's website, and maps, photographs, and other excerpts from the plan will be on display soon in Special Collections.

MRS. VIRGINIA ETHEREDGE
. . . good campaigner

Akron Beacon Journal,
August 11, 1937.

Getting to Know...Virginia Etheredge

by Rebecca Larson-Troyer, Librarian

In 1937, Virginia Frances Etheredge became the first woman elected to Akron City Council. A Democrat who ran on a pro-labor platform, Etheredge served eight years as 10th Ward councilwoman, earning a reputation as hard-working, sincere, rough around the edges, and utterly unfazed by her contemporaries' perception of a woman's role, particularly when it came to politics.

Born around 1900 in Marengo County, Alabama to James and Adelia Beck, Etheredge was one of eight children raised on the Beck family farm. At the age of 16, Etheredge went to work teaching in rural schools to earn money for her private education. In the early 1920s, she married Wiley "Jack" Etheredge, also of Marengo County, and shortly after moved to Akron where she and her husband found work at Goodyear Tire & Rubber Company. In 1927, the couple welcomed their son William "Billy" Etheredge.

Etheredge's interest in politics went as far back as her childhood in Alabama, where she recalled her father's own political pursuits. However, she developed an interest in labor issues while working at Goodyear as a result of company layoffs during the early 1930s. Etheredge was a member of Goodyear Local No. 2 of the United Rubber Workers and had served as the union's first recording secretary. In her first campaign for city council, she was backed by the Labor Non-Partisan League and easily carried the vote in the city's eastside factory district. In her second campaign in 1939, she won over 40% of the ward's votes, beating the runner up by more than 1,000 votes.

During her time on city council, Etheredge chaired the social service committee and fought for parks and playgrounds in the city, in addition to her support of the Works Progress Administration, laborer rights and unions. She was known to put in 16-hour work days which, as several local news stories highlighted, left her husband preparing the family's meals. Despite popularity in her district, Etheredge ruffled more than a few feathers during her political career and was at times described as too outspoken and ill-informed on issues.

News stories referred to her as vocal, fiery, rebellious, determined, and the "antithesis to the 'clinging vine' type." Less flatteringly, she was called the "10th Ward terror," decried for her "masculine pursuits" and her "willingness to talk on any subject, regardless of if she [knew] anything about it." When council President Robert M. Sanderson formed a coalition to gag Etheredge on the council floor, telling her to "sit down and shut up," Etheredge responded, "I won't shut up, and I'd like to see you sit me down." A *Beacon Journal* reporter once anticipated her response to tepid comments on illegal gambling in the city by an assistant law director, writing: "Mrs. Etheredge will no doubt think of many things to say in rebuttal to Mr. Koplin's naïve remark. He is emphatically not to be envied."

The fighting and tenacity of her early years on the council were contrasted by the cooperative spirit of her final term in public service. In 1946, Etheredge retired from council. At her last meeting in office, the known sportswoman was presented with a box of shotgun shells as a gift, which she happily received. In addition to her time on city council, Etheredge served on the Akron Recreation Commission and worked 30 years at Goodyear. She reentered politics, seeking nomination as Democratic candidate for state representative in 1964, but just before the May primary, Etheredge was killed in a traffic accident near the family's Green Township farm. Although there was no time to remove her name from the ballot, posthumous votes were not counted. It's likely she garnered at least a few. Etheredge is buried at Greenlawn Cemetery in Uniontown.

Looking for our latest resources to help you with your genealogy and local history research? Check out our New Books list!

Cincinnati, Ohio, 1815. *Image from the Perry-Castañeda Library Map Collection, University of Texas Libraries.*

Online Resources for Hamilton County

by Iris Bolar, Librarian
This is the last installment in our series covering online genealogy resources for Ohio counties.

Free online genealogical resources for the Cincinnati-Hamilton County area are plentiful. The first website that researchers need to visit is the Hamilton County Genealogical Society (HCGS). This website is loaded with links to local records available online from various other organizations. Full online access to resources created by HCGS requires membership, but the society does provide access to indexes with limited details for non-members to view.

The public index to early obituaries from various Hamilton County newspapers (1827-1920) and the index to obituaries published in *Der Christliche Apologete* (1839-1899) are available on the Death Notices and Obituaries page. The index to church deaths (1890-1899) can be found on the Death Records page, and indexes for war veteran burials are located under the link for Cemeteries. Indexes to Catholic baptism records (up to 1859) are under Births & Baptisms. Guides to religious institutions contain links to congregations and archives. Lease indexes (1851-1901) and a few nineteenth century Hamilton County maps are in the section for Land Records & Maps, while deed indexes (1794-1869) are on a separate page. Marriage indexes (1808-1884) and indexes of probate court banns (1900-1949) are available under Marriages & Divorces. The Wills, Probate and Estates section provides links to indexes and finding aids, and the Court Records section has indexes covering 1841-1879. HCGS lineage societies (First Families,

Settlers and Builders, Century Families) each have all-name indexes. An index of pioneers is also available.

The Hamilton County Probate Court has a variety of digitized online records covering 1791-1994. In addition to wills, estates, early vital records, guardianships, and naturalizations, researchers can view some physician certificates (currently only two volumes online) and an index to minister's licenses (1963-1976). Be sure to read instructions on searching the indexes and records carefully.

The Archives and Rare Books Library of The University of Cincinnati has some local government records online. The library's digital collections include birth and death record index cards (1865-1912), House of Refuge records (1869-1882, 1891-1992), historic city maps, University of Cincinnati yearbooks back to 1894, and Hamilton County Morgue records (1887-1930). The library has also digitized records of Third German Protestant Church (1814-1982) and Civil War exemptions. Transcriptions of naturalization records (1837-1916) and an index to wills (1791-1901) are also viewable.

The Public Library of Cincinnati and Hamilton County has a variety of research offerings. The Digital Library is made up of 80 collections for researchers to search and browse. Within the Genealogy & Local History collection, researchers will find city and county directories (including Covington and Newport, Kentucky), business directories, military records, church records, *Mrs. Devereux's Blue Book of Cincinnati Society* (1894-1922), histories, lists of registered voters (1886-1939), indigent burial records (1901-1981), real estate values (1916-1917, 1922), photographs, and much more. For researching obituaries and news articles, the library's Newsdex indexes area newspapers back to the 1800s.

The Cincinnati History Library and Archives provides a searchable index to local history books, a photograph database, digital journals, and research guides for Jewish and African American resources. The Archives' finding aids can be viewed online. Finally, the Archdiocese of Cincinnati Archives also provides access to its finding aids on OhioLINK.

All-Day Program: Ethics in Genealogy on August 17

Join us on Saturday, August 17, 9:30 am-4 pm in the Main Library Auditorium for an informative all-day program on ethics and legal issues in genealogy. Judy G. Russell, "The Legal Genealogist," will be our speaker. Lectures include "The Ethical Genealogist," "Facts, Photos and Fair Use: Copyright Law for Genealogists, "DNA and the Golden Rule: The Law and Ethics of Genetic Genealogy," and "Roadblocks, Red Lights and Detours: Records Access for Genealogists."

Judy G. Russell is a genealogist with a law degree who writes and lectures on topics ranging from using court records in family history to understanding DNA testing. On the faculty of numerous genealogy institutes, she is a member of the Board of Trustees of the Board for Certification of Genealogists®, from which she holds credentials as a Certified Genealogist® and Certified Genealogical Lecturer℠. She also writes an award-winning blog.

Co-sponsored by the Special Collections Division and the Summit County Chapter of the Ohio Genealogical Society, the program is free and open to the public, and parking is free in the High-Market parking deck. Check out our program flyer for a full program description. Online registration is available on the Library's Events Calendar. For more information, please contact Special Collections at 330-643-9030 or speccollections@akronlibrary.org.

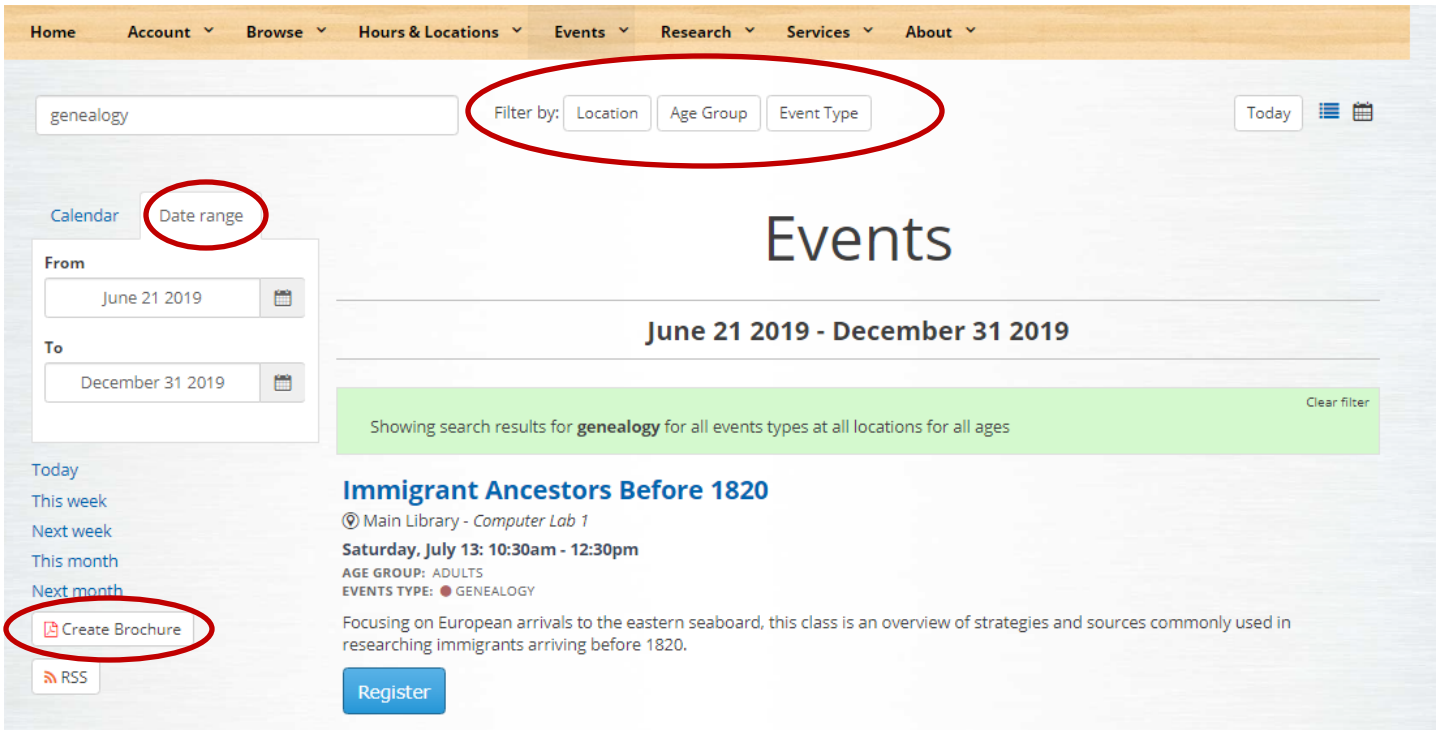
New Library Events Calendar

by Cheri Goldner, Librarian

Did you know that you can now sign up for Library events and reserve meeting rooms for your group's events online?

To browse or search for Library events, go to https://services.akronlibrary.org/events or select "Events Calendar" under the Events menu on the Library's website. You can also select "Events" as an option for the search box appearing at the top of most Library webpages and search by keyword.

Note that events displayed in the results may be limited to the current day, week or month, but you may use the "Date range" option to find events further out. Buttons at the top of the page allow you to filter by location, age group and event type, and there is a "Create Brochure" button that allows you to email or download a PDF of your customized events brochure.

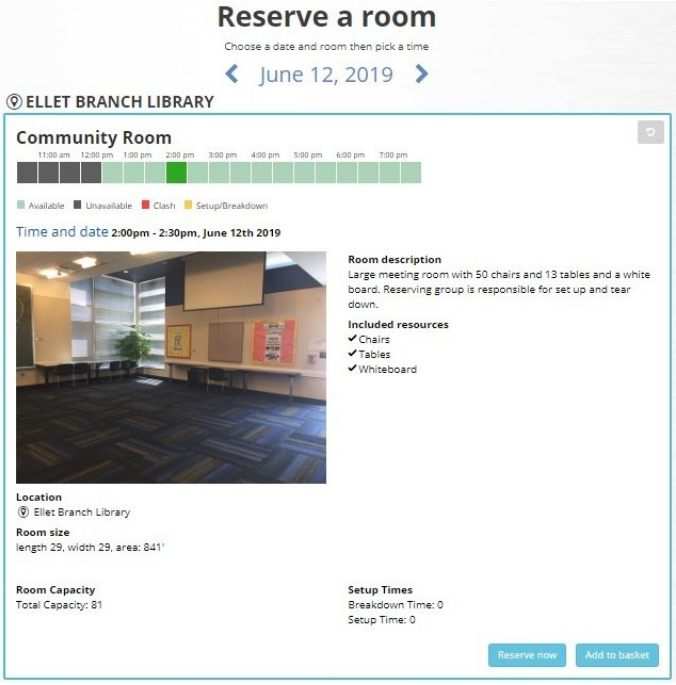


To make the most of all the new events calendar offers, please include your email address and phone number when registering or joining the waitlist for an event. Only entries with email addresses will automatically receive confirmations and reminders for an event and be added to the class list if there is a cancellation. The Library will use your contact information only to contact you about the event.

The confirmation email you receive after registering for an event will include a link and registration reference number that you may use later if you need to cancel your registration online.

To book a meeting room, go to www.akronlibrary.org/services/meeting-rooms or use the link under the Services menu at the top of most Library webpages. A photograph and detailed description (including room size, capacity, and included resources) is provided for each meeting room at each Library location.

If you have any questions about using the new events calendar or want us to register you for one of our genealogy or local history events, contact Special Collections. If you have questions about meeting rooms, please contact the Library's Events team at 330-643-9095 or eventsteam@akronlibrary.org.



We would like to thank the following for their generous contributions:

Daughters of the American Colonists for *A Brief History of Lancaster County* in memory of Marjorie McCormick Gleichert

Emanuel Hyde III for *Red Lodge and its Connections: Understanding the Past While Embracing the Future* by Emanuel Hyde III

Barbara Ann Kemper for genealogy books

Lori Jarosz for genealogy books and compiled research

Linda Powers for photographs and Akron High School Commencement program, 1894

Louise Royce for genealogy books and publications

Cat Russell for *Soul Picked Clean* by Cat Russell

Keith M. Sheldon for materials related to the Order of the Founders and Patriots of America

Karen Stadler for *Haven in the Hardwood: The History of Pickens, West Virginia*

Tom Thompson for Ellet High School yearbooks, 1939, 1945, 1946, 1952, 1959, and 1960

John R. Walker for *Bracketing the Enemy: Forward Observers in WWII* and *Brave Brothers, Grave Brothers: Two American Soldiers in the Argonne Forest: Their Families* by John R. Walker

Cindy Webel for Norton High School yearbook, 1938

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City Chevrolet opened in 1935 at 816 East Market Street and remained in business for over 23 years, It was acquired by MacIntire Chevrolet in 1969. This ad appeared in the Akron Beacon Journal *on June 3, 1959.*

The Akron-Summit County Public Library
Special Collections Division
is located on the third floor
of the Main Library.

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